



ORIGINAL

Arizona Community Action



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December 21, 2005

Commissioner Jeffrey Hatch-Miller, Chairman
Commissioner William A. Mundell
Commissioner Marc Spitzer
Commissioner Mike Gleason
Commissioner Kristin K. Mayes
Arizona Corporation Commission
1200 West Washington Street
Phoenix, AZ 85007-2996

AZ CORP COMMISSION
DOCUMENT CONTROL

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RE: Docket No. T-00000A-05-0380

Dear Commissioners:

On behalf of Arizona Community Action Association (ACAA), I have been participating in the meetings and discussions related to the Lifeline program at the invitation of the Arizona ETC "team." The Team has been working to develop a plan to increase enrollment of qualified individuals in the Arizona Lifeline program. Thanks to your decision in this matter, Decision No. 67941, the eligibility categories were broadened in order to serve more individuals in need of this service in the State of Arizona.

The Team has submitted their recommendation and I write to support that recommendation. ACAA agrees with the Team that automatic enrollment is the single most effective means to accomplish the objective of increasing enrollment in this program.

ACAA has suggested to the group that depending on the date of implementation of the automatic enrollment process, outreach efforts may be required prior to implementation so that eligible ETC customers are informed about the program and provided a method by which to apply for the Lifeline discount, or the Link-Up program. The Commission needs to ensure that reasonable timelines for implementation will be met, as well as reasonable timelines for outreach to begin.

The Team indicates in their report that an unduplicated caseload of 432,559 households are currently enrolled in existing food stamp, TANF and AHCCCS programs and acknowledges that there are at least another 127,733 households that will not be reached. ACAA believes outreach to these households is also important and should not be overlooked.

There are approximately 9000 households currently enrolled in the Lifeline program, exclusive of tribal participation which pushes the number to approximately 60,000 participants. We believe the current low enrollment is indicative of a need to improve efforts to contact and inform eligible households, and ask that outreach efforts be improved, particularly if implementation of the recommendation takes many months to realize.

Lifeline is a program that the approximately 560,292 households may currently take advantage of, and should not be required to wait to learn about the program until this recommended enrollment program is in place. Many of these families need the discount in order to meet other household needs, including the payment of utility and medical bills.

ACAA has offered to work with the ETC's to engage in independent company focused and/or collaborative outreach programs so that eligible families may begin to utilize the discount to which they are entitled now, rather than waiting many more months. This outreach would assume financial support by the ETC's.

ACAA also recognizes the challenges faced by many of the ETC's, particularly those serving rural areas of the State, however we stand prepared to work to creatively reach those families. The bottom line is that millions of dollars annually, dollars that could be going to low-income Arizona families, are not getting to those families. This program has been in existence for years and yet to-date there are 9000 enrolled, out of approximately 560,292. This is simply unacceptable.

If there are any questions you have for me, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue. I greatly appreciate what you have accomplished, as do the members of the ACAA Board.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cynthia Zwick". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cynthia Zwick
Executive Director

c: ACAA Board of Directors
ETC Team